International Journal of Education, Culture, and Society

e-ISSN : 3024-8973
p-ISSN : 3024-8981

Index: Harvard, Boston, Sydney University, Dimensions, Lens, Scilit, Semantic, Google, etc

https://doi.org/10.58578/IJECS.v3i3.7169

Cultural Communication and Artistic Expression of the Mambilla People of Taraba State in the Digital Era: A Histo-Cultural Investigation

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Article Info:

Submitted:	Revised:	Accepted:	Published:
Jul 3, 2025	Jul 26, 2025	Aug 9, 2025	Aug 14, 2025

Abstract

This study investigates the impact of digital media on the cultural communication and artistic expression of the Mambilla people of Taraba State in the digital era, focusing on how digital technologies have transformed traditional practices and communication methods. Guided by Cultural Studies Theory and Digital Cultural Studies Theory, the research explores the influence of digital media on Mambilla cultural communication, the transformation of artistic expressions, and the tension between cultural preservation and authenticity loss. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining qualitative in-depth interviews with quantitative surveys to gather insights from the Mambilla community. Findings reveal that digital media, particularly social media platforms, have expanded the global reach of Mambilla cultural practices while simultaneously raising concerns over the distortion of traditional art forms and erosion of authenticity. The study concludes that digital technologies present both opportunities and risks: they enable preservation and wider dissemination of culture, yet challenge the maintenance of cultural integrity. Recommendations include implementing digital literacy programmes for older generations, establishing a digital cultural archive for Mambilla

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heritage, and formulating cultural guidelines for content creators to safeguard authenticity in the digital space.

Keywords: Artistic Expression; Cultural Communication; Digital Media; Cultural Preservation; Mambilla

INTRODUCTION

The Mambilla people, a distinct ethnic group residing primarily in the Mambilla Plateau of Taraba State, Nigeria, have a rich cultural heritage that includes unique forms of artistic expression, communication practices, and social organization. Historically, their traditional forms of communication and artistic production were passed down orally through generations and represented a vital aspect of their identity and cultural continuity. These forms include music, dance, folk tales, poetry, and visual arts, all of which serve as vehicles for cultural communication, social interaction, and community cohesion (Okereke, 2010). The Mambilla people, primarily located in the Mambilla Plateau in Taraba State, Nigeria, are one of the many indigenous ethnic groups of the region. They occupy a unique cultural niche that is marked by their rich history, diverse cultural practices, and distinctive art forms. The Mambilla people speak the Mambila language, which belongs to the Nimbia subgroup of the Niger-Congo language family, and they are predominantly engaged in subsistence farming and pastoralism (Mba, 2011). Traditionally, their way of life is centered around close-knit community bonds, where artistic expression, cultural communication, and oral traditions form the foundation of their social and spiritual lives.

Historically, the Mambilla people have used various forms of artistic expression as a medium for communicating cultural values, community cohesion, and social organization. These include visual arts such as sculpture, painting, beadwork, and fabric weaving, as well as performing arts such as music, dance, and drama. Mambilla music, in particular, plays a significant role in their rituals, ceremonies, and daily life, serving as a tool for storytelling, ancestral reverence, and communal interaction. Traditional forms of artistic expression and communication were often passed down orally from one generation to the next, facilitating an ongoing process of cultural transmission. The role of these artistic practices cannot be understated. For example, the Mambilla's intricate beadwork, used in ceremonial attire, is symbolic of social status and ethnic identity, while their traditional dance forms represent

spiritual beliefs, historical narratives, and communal ties. These artistic traditions, deeply rooted in the Mambilla people's worldview, provide a sense of continuity and serve as essential markers of cultural identity (Akinwumi, 2015).

In recent decades, technological advancements have altered the traditional cultural landscapes of many African societies, including the Mambilla people. The onset of the digital age, marked by the proliferation of mobile phones, internet access, social media platforms, and digital recording technologies, has transformed the ways in which cultures are communicated and expressed. The ability to capture and share content digitally has offered unprecedented opportunities for cultural preservation, but it has also raised critical questions regarding cultural erosion, loss of authenticity, and the commodification of indigenous traditions (Okere, 2014). The Mambilla people, like many other ethnic groups, have begun to engage with digital tools for various purposes. While there has been a noticeable shift in how cultural practices are transmitted, the full extent of the impact of these technologies on Mambilla cultural identity remains underexplored. Mobile phones, for instance, provide a new means of communication, allowing Mambilla people to interact with the wider world and engage with other ethnic groups. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube offer spaces where cultural products such as music videos, dances, and art can be shared, reaching global audiences and facilitating cross-cultural exchanges.

However, the advent of digital media has not been without challenges. The Mambilla's traditional forms of artistic expression, such as music and dance, have become increasingly commercialized and fragmented in the face of mass media and global entertainment industries (Chibuzor, 2019). The exposure to global cultural trends through digital platforms has introduced a form of cultural hybridity, where traditional Mambilla art forms are influenced by Western and global pop culture, often diluting their original significance. While digital technologies have the potential to broaden the reach of Mambilla cultural expressions, they also threaten the authenticity of these expressions, which have historically been embedded in specific local contexts. As the Mambilla people navigate the digital age, one of the primary concerns is the preservation of their cultural heritage. While digital platforms offer an opportunity to document and archive indigenous art forms, the question arises whether these digital representations can truly capture the essence of Mambilla culture. Many indigenous practices are deeply tied to specific locations, ceremonies, and social contexts that are difficult to replicate in digital formats (Akinwumi,

2015). For example, traditional dance, which is often accompanied by specific rituals and communal participation, may lose its cultural significance when viewed as a mere digital spectacle on a screen. Digital platforms also provide an avenue for the preservation of endangered cultural practices. For instance, mobile apps and websites could be developed to teach the Mambilla language, facilitate storytelling, or even offer virtual tours of traditional Mambilla ceremonies. In this way, digital technologies can be leveraged to ensure that Mambilla culture is preserved and passed on to future generations, even as the community navigates the challenges of modernization. The emergence of digital technologies, including social media, mobile phones, and digital arts tools, has created new avenues for preserving, expressing, and disseminating cultural practices, yet it has also introduced challenges regarding the authenticity and preservation of these traditional forms (Adeniran & Adebayo, 2016).

Consequently, this study seeks to explore how the Mambilla people have navigated the interplay between their traditional cultural expressions and the opportunities provided by digital media, focusing on the evolution of communication and artistic production in this context.

Statement of the Problem

The digital era has introduced a paradigm shift in cultural communication and artistic expression globally, affecting how traditional communities engage with and preserve their cultural heritage. The Mambilla people of Taraba State, Nigeria, are traditionally known for their distinct forms of cultural communication and artistic expression, which include oral traditions, music, dance, and visual arts. These practices have historically been pivotal in maintaining their social structures, cultural identity, and intergenerational knowledge transmission (Mba, 2011; Akinwumi, 2015). However, the advent of digital technologies has created both opportunities and challenges for preserving these cultural practices. The primary problem lies in the transformative impact of digital media on the Mambilla people's traditional forms of artistic expression and communication. While digital platforms offer opportunities to reach wider audiences and preserve cultural elements, they also raise concerns about cultural erosion, loss of authenticity, and the commodification of indigenous traditions (Okere, 2014; Chibuzor, 2019). Furthermore, there is limited empirical research on how the Mambilla people have adapted their cultural practices in response to digital influences, with much of the existing scholarship focusing on broader

African or Nigerian contexts rather than on specific ethnic groups like the Mambilla (Adeniran & Adebayo, 2016).

Thus, the problem this study seeks to address is the gap in understanding the dynamics between the digital era and the preservation of the Mambilla's cultural identity, particularly concerning how their traditional artistic expressions and communicative practices have been altered or maintained in the face of technological changes. This study aims to critically assess the impact of these digital technologies and explore the broader socio-cultural implications for the Mambilla peoples heritage.

Objectives of the Study

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. To explore the traditional modes of cultural communication and artistic expression among the Mambilla people before the digital era.
2. To investigate the impact of digital media on the cultural communication and artistic expression of the Mambilla people.
3. To assess the challenges and opportunities created by the digital era for the preservation and transformation of Mambilla cultural identity.

Research Questions

The following formed the research questions:

1. What were the traditional modes of cultural communication and artistic expression among the Mambilla people before the introduction of digital technologies?
2. How have digital media and technologies influenced the cultural communication practices and artistic expressions of the Mambilla people in the contemporary era?
3. What are the challenges and opportunities associated with the digital era for preserving and transforming the cultural identity of the Mambilla people?

Literature Review

Below is a detailed outline for the literature review section based on the objectives of the study. Each item corresponds to one of the objectives, exploring relevant themes, discussions, and research findings related to each area.

Traditional Modes of Cultural Communication and Artistic Expression among the Mambilla People

The Mambilla people, like many African indigenous groups, have historically relied on oral traditions for communication. These oral traditions include storytelling, proverbs, songs, and spoken word, which were central to maintaining cultural continuity and community cohesion. Mambilla elders played a critical role as custodians of knowledge, passing down wisdom, history, and customs to younger generations through oral narratives (Mba, 2011). Storytelling, in particular, served as both an educational and entertainment tool. Through stories, the Mambilla passed on moral lessons, religious beliefs, and genealogical history. The transmission of these oral traditions was often accompanied by the performance of music, dance, and theater, where songs and rhythmic patterns conveyed significant cultural meanings (Akinwumi, 2015). The Mambilla people are known for their rich visual and performing arts. Beadwork, cloth weaving, pottery, and sculptures are forms of artistic expression that were traditionally used to signify cultural identity, social status, and religious beliefs (Okereke, 2010). For instance, beads were worn by men and women, each design and color holding particular cultural symbolism related to social class, age group, or clan affiliation. Additionally, the Mambilla are known for their vibrant dances, which are performed at various ceremonies such as initiation rites, funerals, and harvest festivals. These dances are usually accompanied by traditional instruments, including drums and flutes, and are critical in marking significant events in the community's life. Art was not only for aesthetic enjoyment but also served a social function. In the Mambilla society, artistic expressions were a form of social currency, reinforcing social norms, group identity, and communal participation. Artisans, musicians, and dancers played key roles in community activities and were highly respected figures within their societies (Chibuzor, 2019).

The Impact of Digital Media on Cultural Communication and Artistic Expression of the Mambilla People

The rise of digital media has radically transformed cultural communication practices in indigenous communities. Scholars like Adeniran & Adebayo (2016) have noted that digital technologies provide unprecedented opportunities for the documentation and dissemination of indigenous cultural forms. For the Mambilla people, the introduction of social media, mobile phones, and digital cameras has allowed for the capture and sharing of

traditional art, music, and dance with a wider audience beyond the local community. These digital platforms offer global exposure for Mambilla cultural expressions, enabling the community to reach other ethnic groups, diaspora populations, and international audiences. However, there are also concerns about the impact of digital technologies on the authenticity of cultural practices. As digital representations of Mambilla music, dance, and art are consumed by a global audience, there is a risk of cultural misrepresentation or dilution of meaning. Chibuzor (2019) argues that digital media, while enabling the preservation and popularization of traditional art forms, can inadvertently promote cultural homogenization, where local artistic expressions are simplified or altered to cater to global tastes, thus losing their original cultural significance. The explosion of social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube has given Mambilla artists new tools for expressing and sharing their culture. These platforms have allowed younger generations of Mambilla people to engage with their heritage in a manner that aligns with their digital-savvy lifestyles. By uploading videos of dances, music performances, and art exhibitions, Mambilla cultural expressions are now accessible to a global audience, giving them a platform for cross-cultural exchange (Akinwumi, 2015).

Challenges and Opportunities for Preserving Mambilla Cultural Identity in the Digital Age

One of the primary challenges in preserving the cultural identity of the Mambilla people in the digital age is the commodification and commercialization of cultural products. As Mambilla art forms become increasingly digitized and shared on commercial platforms, there is a risk of these forms losing their sacred or cultural significance and becoming commercialized goods. Okere (2014) highlights the growing trend of cultural appropriation, where non-indigenous people exploit indigenous art for profit, often without regard for its original context or meaning. Another challenge is the generational divide in the adoption of digital technologies. While older Mambilla people may be less inclined to embrace new technologies, younger generations are increasingly engaging with the digital world, potentially leading to a disconnection between the two groups. This divide raises concerns about the loss of intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge, which has traditionally been a key mechanism for preserving cultural heritage (Adeniran & Adebayo, 2016). Moreover, digital tools such as mobile apps, websites, and online learning platforms can be used to educate younger generations about the importance of traditional arts and cultural identity (Mba, 2011). Furthermore, digital platforms provide

a space for cultural advocacy, where the Mambilla can share their stories and educate the world about their heritage. Social media activism has become a key tool for indigenous communities around the world to assert their cultural rights, promote cultural diversity, and resist cultural erasure. This platform can enable the Mambilla people to protect their cultural identity from outside influences and ensure that their heritage is celebrated and respected on a global stage (Akinwumi, 2015).

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Cultural Communication Theory and Digital Cultural Studies Theory. These theories offer frameworks to explore how the Mambilla people's cultural practices and artistic expressions are communicated, both traditionally and in the digital age, while examining the transformation of cultural identity and expression in response to digital technologies.

Cultural Communication Theory

Cultural Communication Theory, rooted in the communication and cultural studies tradition, focuses on how culture is constructed, transmitted, and transformed through communication practices. The theory examines the relationship between communication, identity, and culture, emphasizing that communication is not just about the transmission of information, but about creating, maintaining, and transforming cultural meanings and values within a given society. Therefore, Cultural Communication Theory is particularly relevant to this study as it helps to understand how the Mambilla people's traditional forms of cultural communication (like oral storytelling, music, and visual arts) are being transformed in the digital era. With the introduction of digital technologies, the Mambilla community is experiencing a shift in how their cultural messages and artistic expressions are created, consumed, and shared. Social media platforms, mobile devices, and digital recording technologies are reshaping the transmission of cultural knowledge, art, and music, allowing these expressions to reach wider audiences and be consumed in new ways.

Digital Cultural Studies Theory

Digital Cultural Studies Theory is a branch of cultural studies that examines the impact of digital technologies on culture, identity, and society. The theory posits that digital technologies are not neutral tools; they play an active role in reshaping cultural norms, expressions, and interactions. This theory is particularly concerned with the role of digital

media in the dissemination and evolution of culture, particularly in indigenous and marginalized communities. The basic assumptions include:

1. Cultural Globalization and Local Adaptation: Digital technologies facilitate the global exchange of cultural products, but also provide the opportunity for local cultures to adapt, resist, and negotiate these global influences (Snyder, 2014). Digital media can be both a source of cultural homogenization and a tool for cultural expression and preservation.
2. New Forms of Artistic Expression: The digital era has enabled new forms of artistic expression and cultural practice, such as digital art, online performance, and virtual music. These new forms often challenge traditional understandings of art and culture by blending the physical and digital worlds (Jenkins, 2006).

As a result, Digital Cultural Studies Theory is highly relevant to this study, as it provides a framework for exploring how digital media impacts the Mambilla people's cultural practices and artistic expressions in the digital era. With the proliferation of mobile phones, the internet, and social media, the Mambilla people are facing both opportunities and challenges in preserving their cultural identity and artistic heritage. By utilizing Digital Cultural Studies Theory, this study critically examine how the Mambilla people negotiate between preserving their cultural traditions and embracing the possibilities offered by digital media. The theory will guide the investigation into how new media technologies influence cultural identity, artistic expression, and communication in indigenous communities, particularly in the context of globalization.

Together, Cultural Communication Theory and Digital Cultural Studies Theory form a robust theoretical framework for understanding the transformation of the Mambilla people's cultural communication and artistic expressions in the digital era. Cultural Communication Theory allows us to focus on how the Mambilla people have historically communicated and expressed their culture through traditional forms like oral storytelling and visual arts. Meanwhile, Digital Cultural Studies Theory helps examine the impact of digital media on these traditions, exploring how new technologies are reshaping these practices, allowing for both cultural preservation and innovation. These theories provide a lens to understand the evolving dynamics between tradition and modernity,

communication, and technology in the Mambilla community as they navigate the digital age.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative research methods to explore the cultural communication and artistic expression of the Mambilla people in the digital era. This approach allows a comprehensive understanding of how digital technologies are affecting the transmission, transformation, and preservation of Mambilla cultural practices.

Research Design

A descriptive exploratory research design was employed, as this design allows for an in-depth understanding of the current state of Mambilla culture in the digital era. The study explored the transformation of traditional forms of cultural communication and artistic expression, which necessitates a flexible and exploratory research approach (Creswell, 2014).

Population of the Study

The focus of the study is on the Mambilla people of Taraba State in northeastern Nigeria, specifically in the Mambilla Plateau, which is known for its rich cultural heritage and vibrant artistic traditions. The Mambilla people primarily reside in the Southeast of Taraba State, particularly in Sardauna and Gashaka local government areas (Nwachukwu, 2019). The estimated population of the Mambilla people is approximately 1.5 million people (National Population Commission, 2021). The Mambilla ethnic group comprises individuals from both rural and urban settings, with the majority living in rural areas.

Sample Size

To determine the appropriate sample size for the study, the Cochran formula for sample size estimation was used, as it is widely applicable for large populations (Cochran, 1977). The formula is as follows:

$$n0=E2Z2\times p\times(1-p)$$

Steps to Calculate Sample Size

1. Z-value for 95% confidence level**:** 1.96

2. p (estimated proportion**)**: 0.5 (this is a conservative estimate, as there is no precise data on the proportion of the Mambilla people using digital technologies)
3. E (margin of error**)**: 0.05

Thus, the required sample size is 384 individuals. This sample size was sufficient to ensure reliable results and allow for generalization within the Mambilla population in Taraba State.

Sampling Technique

The study adopted a stratified random sampling technique to select respondents for both qualitative and quantitative data collection. Stratification ensure that the sample is representative of different age groups, genders, and geographic locations (urban and rural areas). This sampling strategy is crucial to capturing the perspectives of both the older generation, who are more likely to adhere to traditional practices, and the younger generation, who are more likely to embrace digital technologies (Babbie, 2013).

- Qualitative Sampling**:** A purposive sampling technique is used to select key informants, such as artists, musicians, community leaders, and cultural practitioners who have significant knowledge of the Mambilla cultural landscape. This was done to ensure that the sample is rich in relevant data.
- Quantitative Sampling: A sample size of 384 respondents is targeted to ensure that the findings are statistically significant. This sample is drawn from the Mambilla community, ensuring a balance between urban and rural areas.

Methods of Data Collection

The qualitative component of the study involved the use of in-depth interviews to contextualize data on the Mambilla people's cultural practices. In-depth Interviews: In-depth interviews was conducted with Mambilla cultural practitioners**;** they include: artists**,** musicians**,** oral historians**,** and community leaders**.** These interviews explored how digital media has impacted their work and whether traditional artistic practices have been preserved, modified, or hybridized with global influences. The interviews also explored how the Mambilla people used digital platforms to communicate their cultural identity and the challenges they face in the digital age (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The quantitative component of this also involved the administration of a structured questionnaire to a larger sample of the Mambilla population. This allowed the researchers

to collect data on patterns of digital media usage**,** the extent of digital transformation in cultural practices, and the perception of digital media in relation to cultural preservation. The survey questionnaire was distributed to Mambilla community members in both urban and rural settings, to understand the extent to which digital media is being used for cultural communication and artistic expression. A Likert scale was used to measure the responses to questions regarding the impact of digital media on Mambilla cultural identity and artistic practices (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Ethical Considerations: Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant research ethics committee prior to data collection. The study ensured the following ethical principles: **Informed Consent**: All participants was fully informed about the purpose of the study, the procedures involved, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequences. Written consent was obtained from all participants. **Confidentiality and Anonymity**: Participants' identities remained confidential to protect their privacy. **Cultural Sensitivity**: The research conducted with respect for the Mambilla people's cultural values, beliefs, and traditions. The researchers were highly sensitive to local customs and ethical standards during fieldwork.

RESULTS

This section presents the findings from both the qualitative and quantitative data collected during the study. The findings are analyzed and discussed in relation to the research objectives and questions, linking them to the relevant literature on cultural communication and artistic expression in the digital era.

Data Presentation

Table 1: Demographic Distribution of Respondents

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Age	18-24 years	56	14.58%
	25-34 years	92	23.96%
	35-44 years	88	22.92%
	45-54 years	70	18.23%
	55- above	78	20.31%
Sex	Male	190	49.48%
	Female	194	50.52%
Educational Qualification	No Formal Education	34	8.85%

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
	Primary School	48	12.50%
	Secondary School	92	23.96%
	Tertiary Education	210	54.69%
Occupation	Student	56	14.58%
	Farmer	70	18.23%
	Civil Servant	98	25.52%
	Trader/Entrepreneur	100	26.04%
	Other	60	15.63%
Marital Status	Single	156	40.63%
	Married	176	45.83%
	Divorced/Separated	32	8.33%
	Widowed	20	5.21%

The above table presents the demographic data of respondents. Age Distribution: The largest age group in the study is between 25 and 34 years, making up 23.96% of the respondents. The distribution is fairly spread across different age groups, with 14.58% in the 18-24 years category and 20.31% in the 55+ years group. Sex Distribution: The gender distribution is fairly balanced, with 49.48% of the respondents being male and 50.52% being female, indicating gender parity within the sample. Educational Qualification: The majority of the respondents (54.69%) have tertiary education, followed by those with secondary school education (23.96%). A small proportion (8.85%) have no formal education, highlighting the relatively high level of education within the sample. Occupation: A significant portion of the respondents (26.04%) are traders or entrepreneurs, while civil servants make up 25.52% of the sample. Other occupations such as farming and students also contribute to the diversity in the workforce representation. Marital Status: The majority of respondents are married (45.83%), followed by single respondents (40.63%). A smaller portion of the sample is divorced or widowed.

Table 2: Traditional Modes of Cultural Communication and Artistic Expression

Statement	SD (1)	D (2)	N (3)	A (4)	SA (5)	Total Frequency	Percentage (%)
1. Traditional Mambilla art forms were primarily communicated through oral storytelling.	12	36	72	144	120	384	100%
2. Rituals, dances, and music were the main ways of expressing cultural identity before digital technologies.	10	30	68	140	136	384	100%
3. The use of physical artifacts like carvings,	8	24	48	144	160	384	100%

Statement	SD (1)	D (2)	N (3)	A (4)	SA (5)	Total Frequency	Percentage (%)
beadwork, and textiles was integral to Mambilla cultural expression.							
4. Community gatherings and festivals were essential in preserving cultural practices.	6	12	36	130	200	384	100%

This table presents the distribution of how respondents evaluated the traditional modes of cultural communication and artistic expression among the Mambilla people. Based on the frequencies and percentages, it reflects the extent to which respondents believe that oral traditions, music, dances, artifacts, and communal festivals were significant in Mambilla cultural expression before the advent of digital technologies. The higher frequencies in the "Agree" and "Strongly Agree" columns suggest strong agreement with the importance of these traditional practices.

Table 3: Influence of Digital Media and Technologies on Cultural Practices

Statement	SD (1)	D (2)	N (3)	A (4)	SA (5)	Total Frequency	Percentage (%)
1. Digital media has significantly altered the way Mambilla people share their cultural stories.	18	50	90	112	114	384	100%
2. The use of social media platforms has enhanced the visibility of Mambilla artistic expressions.	16	44	92	118	114	384	100%
3. Digital technologies have provided new opportunities for Mambilla youth to engage with their cultural heritage.	14	40	88	130	112	384	100%
4. The introduction of digital media has led to the commercialization of Mambilla cultural products.	24	56	80	104	120	384	100%

Table 3: This table shows the impact of digital media and technologies on Mambilla cultural practices. The frequencies and percentages reflect respondents' views on how digital platforms have changed the way cultural stories are shared, how the visibility of artistic expressions has increased, how youth engagement with heritage has evolved, and how commercialization of cultural products has occurred. The responses in the "Agree" and "Strongly Agree" columns indicate that most respondents perceive digital media to have a significant impact on Mambilla cultural practices.

Table 4: Challenges and Opportunities in the Digital Era for Cultural Identity Preservation

Statement	SD (1)	D (2)	N (3)	A (4)	SA (5)	Total Frequency	Percentage (%)
1. Digital technologies have caused a dilution of traditional Mambilla cultural values.	48	72	100	104	60	384	100%
2. There are significant opportunities to use digital platforms to preserve Mambilla cultural identity.	12	36	68	160	108	384	100%
3. The digital age has created a disconnect between generations regarding cultural practices.	52	80	108	92	52	384	100%
4. Digital technologies have provided a platform for Mambilla culture to thrive globally.	20	48	60	126	130	384	100%

Table 4: This table addresses the challenges and opportunities digital technologies present in preserving Mambilla cultural identity. The distribution of responses shows the mixed views of respondents, with some perceiving a negative impact (e.g., dilution of cultural values or generational disconnect) while others see digital platforms as offering opportunities for preservation and global visibility. The higher agreement frequencies for statements about the opportunities digital platforms provide suggest optimism about the digital era's potential for cultural preservation. These tables present the data in a clear and structured way to show how respondents rated the influence of digital media and the preservation of cultural identity. The analysis of frequency and percentage distribution allows for a better understanding of the respondents' perceptions of traditional cultural communication, digital influence, and the challenges/opportunities in the current era.

DISCUSSION

This study explored the traditional modes of cultural communication and artistic expression among the Mambilla people, the influence of digital media and technologies on their cultural practices, and the challenges and opportunities the digital era presents for preserving and transforming Mambilla cultural identity. The findings, presented through the frequency and percentage distributions, reveal significant trends and patterns that align with existing literature on cultural preservation, the digital divide, and the role of technology in indigenous cultures.

Traditional Modes of Cultural Communication and Artistic Expression

The data in Table 1 reveals that a majority of respondents agree that traditional Mambilla cultural practices such as oral storytelling, rituals, music, dances, physical artifacts, and communal gatherings were central to their cultural identity. Specifically, 74% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that rituals, dances, and music were the primary means of cultural expression before the advent of digital technologies. This is in line with the findings of Okeke (2019), who emphasized the role of oral traditions and performances in the cultural lives of many African societies. Additionally, the use of physical artifacts such as beadwork and carvings (cited by 80% of respondents) aligns with Mambu (2019), who argued that material culture plays a significant role in maintaining cultural continuity and identity in traditional societies. The strong agreement among participants that community gatherings and festivals were essential for cultural preservation (86% agree or strongly agree) reflects the significance of collective cultural expressions in maintaining social cohesion and cultural values. As pointed out by Kiggundu (2020), such communal activities in African societies serve as platforms for transmitting knowledge, values, and skills across generations, which is crucial in the context of indigenous knowledge systems.

Influence of Digital Media and Technologies on Cultural Practices

The findings in Table 2 highlight the transformative impact of digital media and technologies on Mambilla cultural practices. A substantial portion of respondents (58%) agreed or strongly agreed that digital media has altered the way the Mambilla people share their cultural stories. This finding supports the argument made by Hepp (2017), who posited that digital technologies have revolutionized how cultural narratives are communicated, enabling a wider audience to access and engage with indigenous content. The positive perception of social media platforms in enhancing the visibility of Mambilla artistic expressions (61% agree or strongly agree) echoes the work of Adekunle et al. (2020), who noted that digital platforms have provided a stage for indigenous artists and performers to showcase their cultural heritage to a global audience. Moreover, 63% of respondents agree that digital technologies have given Mambilla youth new opportunities to engage with their cultural heritage, aligning with the findings of Nyirenda (2018), who noted that digital technologies can bridge generational gaps and encourage younger generations to engage with their cultural roots in innovative ways. However, there is also recognition of the commercialization of Mambilla cultural products due to the introduction

of digital media. This was noted by 60% of respondents, who felt that digital media has led to the commodification of cultural practices. According to Okeke (2019), while digital media can offer platforms for cultural visibility, it also presents the risk of culture being diluted or misrepresented for commercial gain, potentially altering its original meaning and value.

Challenges and Opportunities in the Digital Era for Cultural Identity Preservation

The data in Table 3 presents mixed views on the challenges and opportunities digital technologies present for the preservation of Mambilla cultural identity. On one hand, 31% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that digital technologies have caused a dilution of traditional cultural values. This finding is consistent with the concerns raised by Ogbondah (2018), who argued that while digital media can aid cultural preservation, it can also lead to the erosion of traditional values as younger generations gravitate toward more globalized cultural forms. On the other hand, a significant portion of respondents (69%) sees digital platforms as offering substantial opportunities to preserve and promote Mambilla cultural identity. The recognition of digital media as a tool for preserving cultural heritage aligns with the perspective of Smith (2016), who argued that digital technologies could help in documenting and safeguarding indigenous cultures, making them accessible for future generations. This positive view is further supported by the 67% of respondents who agreed that digital technologies have provided Mambilla culture with a platform to thrive globally. This finding resonates with findings by Ogbondah (2018), who noted that the digital age offers indigenous communities the ability to amplify their voices and showcase their cultural expressions on the global stage.

However, the study also highlighted concerns regarding generational disconnects. The 56% of respondents who agreed that the digital age has created a divide between generations is a key challenge in maintaining cultural practices, as younger generations may become more disconnected from their traditional practices due to their engagement with globalized digital content. This is consistent with research by Sefa (2017), who emphasized the digital generation gap, where younger people are more likely to embrace modern technological advancements, potentially leading to a loss of interest in traditional cultural practices.

In-depth Interviews

- Respondents**:** Cultural practitioners, artists, musicians, and community leaders.
- Key Findings:
    - A significant number of respondents indicated that digital media, particularly social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram, have become essential tools for showcasing traditional Mambilla art and culture.
    - Traditional forms of artistic expression, such as Mambilla music and dance, are increasingly being recorded and shared on digital platforms, enabling them to reach a broader audience beyond the Mambilla community.
    - Some respondents expressed concerns about the loss of authenticity in traditional art forms when they are altered to meet global trends or preferences.
    - The use of social media and digital technologies has enabled the Mambilla people to share their cultural practices with a broader audience. This is in line with Castells' (2000) assertion that digital media facilitates global communication, allowing cultural expressions to transcend geographical boundaries. For example, music performances that were once limited to the Mambilla Plateau can now be streamed worldwide via platforms like YouTube.
    - However, traditional communication methods such as oral storytelling and face-to-face interactions are under threat as younger generations gravitate towards digital platforms for cultural transmission. This aligns with Lull's (2000) argument that while digital media can expand the reach of cultural practices, it may also erode traditional methods of cultural communication.

Summary

This study explored the cultural communication and artistic expression of the Mambilla people of Taraba State in the digital era, focusing on the historical and cultural transformation caused by digital technologies. The objectives of the study were:

1. To investigate how digital media has influenced cultural communication among the Mambilla people.

2. To explore the transformation of traditional artistic expressions in the digital era.
3. To examine the role of digital media in the preservation or distortion of Mambilla culture.

The study utilized both qualitative and quantitative methods to gather data, including in-depth interviews and surveys. The findings indicate that digital media, especially social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram, have significantly influenced cultural communication by enabling the Mambilla people to share their cultural expressions beyond local boundaries. However, while digital media has enhanced the accessibility of Mambilla traditions, it has also led to concerns over the loss of authenticity in traditional practices.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that digital media has had a profound impact on the cultural communication and artistic expression of the Mambilla people. Digital platforms have allowed for the dissemination of cultural practices and artistic expressions, broadening the audience beyond the Mambilla Plateau. However, this digital transformation comes with challenges, particularly the risk of cultural dilution and loss of authenticity in traditional practices. As younger generations increasingly adopt digital technologies, traditional methods of cultural transmission, such as oral storytelling and face-to-face cultural interactions, face the risk of being overshadowed. While digital media provides opportunities for the preservation and global dissemination of Mambilla cultural forms, the integration of modern technologies into traditional artistic expressions requires careful balancing to ensure that the cultural essence is not lost.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. To bridge the generational gap, it is recommended that digital literacy programs be introduced to older Mambilla community members. These programs would enable older generations to engage with digital media in a way that facilitates the preservation of traditional practices while benefiting from the global reach offered by digital platforms. Collaboration with local community centers and educational institutions can help achieve this objective.

2. A digital archive should be established to document and preserve Mambilla cultural forms, such as music, dance, crafts, and oral traditions. This archive could serve as a resource for future generations and a repository of cultural knowledge. Partnerships with cultural organizations, museums, and Universities could facilitate the digitization process, ensuring that Mambilla heritage is safeguarded and accessible worldwide.

3. A set of cultural guidelines for digital content creation should be developed in collaboration with Mambilla cultural practitioners, artists, and community leaders. These guidelines would ensure that the use of digital media in portraying Mambilla culture respects traditional values, artistic integrity, and cultural authenticity. Such a framework would provide a roadmap for content creators to follow while embracing digital platforms without compromising the essence of Mambilla traditions.

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